



# THE WASPS

OF ARISTOPHANES





## [In order of appearance]

Sarah Palin / 2nd Amendment	Lauren Jarvis
Ziggy	Allen Huang
Jerry	Matt Simonton
Del O' Cleon	Janani Balasubramanian
Phil O' Cleon	Jonathan McDermott
Mama Grizzlies	Carolyn MacDonald (Leader)
Kid / Tea-Party Supporter / 1st Amendment	Thea De Armond
Rabbit / Victim	Xenia Dmitrieva
Eagle / James Madison	Kate Kreindler
Glenn Bark / Thomas Jefferson	David Fifield
Baroof Obowow	
Party Girl / 21st Amendment	
Priest	
Lawyer	
Iraq War Veteran	
Pianist	
Director	Al Duncan
Producers	Carolyn MacDonald
	Alan Sheppard
Costumer	Lisa Lowe
Choreographer	Nikita Vashi
Properties	Federica Carugati
Set Construction	Garen Arthur
	Jacqueline Montagne
Lighting	Dan-El Padilla Peralta
Photographer / Puppet Master	Sarah C. Murray
Program	Zachary Moull

Translation by Nicholas Boterf, Artemis Brod, David Driscoll, Al Duncan, Foivos Karachalios, James Kierstead, Carolyn MacDonald, Jacqueline Montagne, Mark Pyzyk, Alan Sheppard, Matt Simonton, and Hans Wietzke

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

[AL DUNCAN]

THIS JANUARY, I found myself in the center seat on a short connecting flight from San Antonio to Dallas, returning to the Bay Area from an academic conference. On my right sat a British classicist, paging through a new book on Roman homosexuality she bought at the conference for her trans-Atlantic flight. I, for my part had our newly-pressed *Wasps* script on the tray table, pen in hand. Scribbling notes, making cuts and posturing authority, I silently hoped that a stray glance from the scholar might spark some polite academic chat: we'd begin with the writings of Sir Kenneth and Henderson, transition through discussions of the body and performance into my well-whittled two-minute dissertation spiel, this in turn leading to email-exchanges, conference invitations, job offers –

My serial imaginings were interrupted when, on my left, a sturdy 6'5" uniformed soldier, Aaron, sat down with a smile that surpassed his stature. Aaron and I talked the entire flight.

It turned out that Aaron had also been in San Antonio for the weekend. He had worked as a recruiter at the Army-sponsored All-American Bowl™, the high school football All-Star game – a competitive celebration of youth, nationalism, and militarism not unlike some dramatic festivals of fifth-century Athens. I, through tweed and glasses, felt smug to report that I knew the East had won, 13-10 (from a fortuitous phone call earlier that day – thanks, mom).

Aaron quickly noticed the script and asked me about the show. My first talking points about SCIT came easily. I explained that this was our group's third ancient comedy and that in the first two years we had settled on some peculiar traditions. For instance, we had made it our practice to keep the *phalloi* (oversized,

flaccid, and very visible *membra virilia* that characterized Greek Old Comedy) while abandoning other scenic conventions such as masks, fat-suits, stockings, and more from the ancient theater. I admitted to Aaron that, despite an ideal of accuracy, our translations tended to be written primarily with our own funny bones in mind. And, though we were all too eager to keep the metatheatricality, obscenity and violent sexuality of the original text, we dropped the difficult poetic meter of the Greek and frequently grafted on modern comedic formulas: parodies of top-40 songs, visual gags, etc.

So far, so good. Aaron was fully on board with the project, intrigued if somewhat perplexed by the *phalloi*. But his next question sent me spinning: "So, what's this play that you're working on about?" Crap. How could I soft-pedal our play's leftist politics? It had been written at the boiling point of election fever in early November 2010... had we gone too far? I stammered out some generalizations about America's venomous political scene and the media's role in the national debate, relying on the middle-ground staked by Jon Stewart's Rally to Restore Sanity in October (okay, slightly left-of-center). I lingered on the historical instead of the present: it was easy to say that the original *Wasps* was sharply political, directed chiefly against the Athenian general and statesman, Cleon. It was also easy to say that our adaptation attacked the suggestive, partisan rants of Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh and Keith Olbermann. Aphorisms and the demagogues



who spout them always make easy targets and have long been the bread and butter of political comedy. But it was clear that I was talking around our political message, our point.

How to talk to a soldier about a show that so clearly leaned left? I strategically set my pen down on some of our more egregious and cheap anti-conservative puerilities (John Boner, Tea-Bagger), despite Aristophanic precedent for such *ad hominem* wordplay. The tragedy in Tucson had occurred the day before our flight, and details and motivations were still hazy; but in Aaron's presence, I was worried that our comedy had become trapped in the very vitriol it initially set out to satirize. But, in a crowded plane, fastened tight to your chair, one must be civil and polite. Centuries of technological advancement have led society to a point where people need rarely, if ever, speak with those fellow citizens with whom they don't agree. The as-yet unconquered expense of air-travel has made fuselages the last bastion of enforced civility—JetBlue flight attendant debacles aside.

But my anxiety was overblown. Aaron, for his part, proved the perfect audience. He thought the whole show—and the Tea Party scene in particular—sounded hilarious. The career soldier had a more complicated political outlook than I had stereotyped. Coming from a military family, he favored strong, but limited, national defense and was thoroughly positive about the repeal of DADT (he was in recruitment, after all). Aaron loved to cook, offering me panegyrics of quinoa and kale, and was a practicing vegetarian—devotion, not fashion, in his suburban Kansas home. Devoted to nature and its preservation (lest I write *conservation*), Aaron was proud to share a fitting personal anecdote about failed ideals before we deplaned. While he was working with the Army Corps of Engineers on an ecologically sensitive road-construction project to connect a coastal Native American village to the main road in Alaska, a group of Greenpeace activists

on a barge motored out to the site in protest. However, the overladen Greenpeace vessel marooned itself on protected coastal area and was rescued (and fined) by the Coast Guard. *Army Corps, ftw.*

But as Del notes in this very play, "Don't make up your mind until you've heard both points of view!" If Greenpeace's clumsy protest and oversimplified message deserve our laughter, their core mission remains valuable and viable. Similar complaints and praises can be made about the Army (still one of America's most-trusted institutions seven years after Abu Ghraib) or even the Tea Party, whose mobilization and overwhelmingly non-violent participation in this country's political scene ought to be respected even by those of us who oppose their vision. Sure, Aaron and I might have gone on to find our differences and toe the party lines. But for those 45 minutes of enforced civility in the sky, we found much common ground.

This is not written in support of moral relativism in the face of a complex world. Nor does *The Wasps* suggest that we withdraw ourselves from the real world of politics and dwell instead a comic utopia of harmless, ersatz politics—the kind which Del offers her father in our play's Tea Party. Two and a half millennia after Aristophanes, Jon Stewart's rally (and his role in passing the Zadroga Act) show that comedy still speaks to *ta dikaiā*, that is, to justice. And while the genre may not always be capable of changing minds and hearts, it offers the reward of opening up civil discourse while running only the risk of escalating laughter. To quote Del O'Cleón again: "It'll be tough, and it's going to take some serious thought—more than you get from an ancient Greek comedy—to fix our nation's broken system. But I have to try."

We at SCIT are proud to offer you our *Wasps*: a creative and academic exercise of translation and performance, an indulgence in buffoonery, an act of disciplinary outreach, a community building experience, a political commentary but above all, we hope, a comedy.

# TRANSLATORS' NOTE

[ARTEMIS BROD & MARK PYZYK]

THE WASPS will be SCIT's third Aristophanes play in as many years. Over that time, we've run the gauntlet of theme and subject—from the anti-war farce *Acharnians* to the mock-academic lampoon *Clouds*—and in that time, we've gotten better and better at a sort of hive-translation, made possible by modern technology. Using services like Google Documents, we've managed to corral twelve Stanford classicists into the translation process, drawing on their unique skills and comedic stylings. Far from stifling creativity, what they've produced is something wonderfully eclectic, showing influences from a thousand directions. There are many jokes in this translation that, so far as many of us are concerned, simply appeared out of the aether. And yet the story remains focused and coherent in all of its particulars, the result of methods from an older era—simple, face-to-face collaboration. Honed in the fires of many an intense translation and editing session—including one magical sea-side retreat in November—the play was simultaneously written in a mode as traditional as any.

Of course, framing it in these terms required some adjustment—though in the end, less than one might expect. Our comic hero is Phil O'Cleon, a man who dreams of the 24-hour news cycle and mama grizzlies on the prowl. He tea-bags whenever he's able, but at our story's beginning he is being held captive in his own house by a concerned daughter,



Now, why *The Wasps*, exactly? Aristophanes' original play, written for an Athenian

Del O’Cleon. Given the oppositional nature of the story, and of our modern subject matter, we needed Del to be as liberal, cosmopolitan, and latte-sipping as possible. This is, after all, as Aristophanes would have wanted it—a comedy of gross caricatures.

There were, of course, some references that proved challenging. Primary among them was the sudden pressure placed on the play’s message by the tragic events of January 8th, 2011. On that day, a man opened fire at an open-air meeting between congressional representative Gabrielle Gifford and her constituents in Tucson, AZ. Nineteen people were shot, six died. We were all shocked at the senselessness of the act, and immediately recognized that certain parts of the play would take on new and perhaps unwelcome significance. Now, whether one believes that years of media bombardment have encouraged an everyday atmosphere of paranoia and anger, which is only now producing tangible results, is a question that will necessarily remain unsettled for the moment.

It is nevertheless our belief that such a dialogue must continue, and our own work, if it can contribute to that in any way, should remain unexpurgated. Therefore, it was our decision to leave the play unedited.

We might take a minute, now, to mention the ending. It will seem strange and rather sudden to audiences, a fade-to-black that solves nothing and descends into irredeemable chaos. And this is how Aristophanes intended it. *The Wasps*, in whatever version it comes, ends on sublime absurdity. Of course, it is said comedies typically end with a wedding. This might be true, but sometimes they simply end in medias res: in this sense, *The Wasps* finds more in common with John Landis’ *Animal House* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* than with Menander’s *Dyskolos*. But in this case, the ending is perhaps most effective at pointing to the ongoing nature of our own modern conflict, of the points to be made on both sides (as well as the glaring contradictions inherent in each), and our need as an audience (and as engaged citizens) to keep our ears open.

The cast and crew would like to extend their

# SPECIAL THANKS

to the following individuals and groups for their diligence and care:

*Iden Bagdadchi*

*Chris Golde*

*Anika Green*

*Ryan Johnson*

*Margo Keeley*

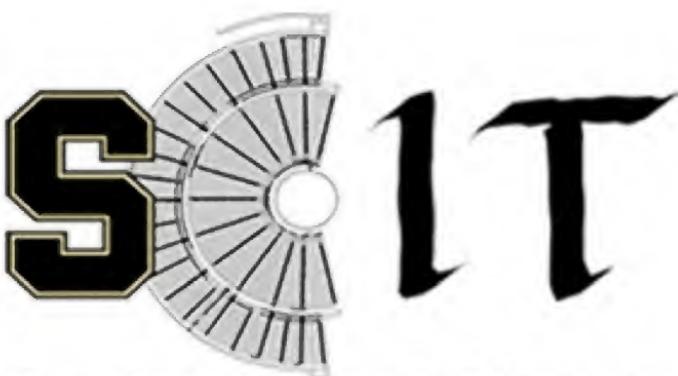
*Hongyi Marston*

*Richard Martin*

*Sean McKibbon and the GovCo staff*

*Dayna Muniz, Leilani Lee, and Stanford Labor & Events Services*

*Sam Perlman*



A SCIT PRODUCTION, GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY THE STANFORD GSC, ASSU, VPGE, AND CLASSICS DEPARTMENT



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